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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 QUITO 002207

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EC](#)

SUBJECT: IMPROVING ECUADOR-COLOMBIA RELATIONS

Classified By: PolChief Erik Hall for reason 1.4 (b&d)

11. (C) Summary: Communication and relations between President Palacio and President Uribe remain good, highlighted by recent GOE action against the FARC here. But the GOE continues to insist that aerial spraying of pesticides be suspended along the border while a new study is prepared. Palacio's mention of the issue in his UNGA speech is an attempt to hand off the fumigation issue to international experts, but means the issue will certainly survive the upcoming change of Foreign Minister. We are hopeful that the change will lower the tone of the GOE's public discourse on Colombia. Fumigation and FARC semantics are second-tier issues with domestic political ramifications here, requiring more work between the two governments. We are encouraging the GOE and Colombian Embassy here to use dialogue to increase understanding and overcome bilateral differences. End Summary.

Presidential Relations Good

12. (C) Palacio called the Ambassador on September 23 to relate his conversation with Uribe the night before, in which he relayed news of the GOE arrest and prospective deportation to Colombia of high FARC leader Marcial Eduardo Campana Pineda. The deportation took place the morning of September 24. Palacio seemed elated by the effect of the news on Uribe, who welcomed it.

13. (C) Uribe took the opportunity to ask Palacio's views on whether the GOC should grant ex-president Lucio Gutierrez political asylum. (Note: Gutierrez applied for asylum on September 21, and was granted interim status to stay in Colombia while his application is considered, for 90 days. Terms of the interim status reportedly prohibit political statements, forcing Gutierrez to cancel planned public activities, according to press reports here.)

14. (C) Palacio told the Ambassador that he replied to Uribe that Gutierrez' status in Colombia is an internal Colombian matter in which he would not interfere, except to deny that Gutierrez is the victim of political persecution by the GOE.

15. (C) National Police Chief Jose Vinueza related the same conversation slightly differently to the DCM on September 24. Vinueza claimed to be present during the conversation, but said that when asked about Gutierrez (and at Vinueza's suggestion), Palacio warned Uribe to be careful of Gutierrez' links to the FARC. Vinueza also said Gutierrez is in possession of an air ticket returning to Peru around October 20. For his part, he believed it would be better for Gutierrez to be granted asylum with accompanying restrictions (on political activity), since he enjoys excellent relations with his Colombian counterpart, which would help the GOE monitor Gutierrez' activities in Colombia.

Fumigation Issue Not Going Away

16. (C) The main issue dividing the two neighbors is the GOE's request that Colombia suspend aerial pesticide fumigation of coca crops within 10 km of the Ecuador-Colombia border. Both countries support a compromise move to request that an international health institution (e.g. WHO, PAHO) conduct a scientific investigation of the effects of spraying on Ecuadorians living near the border. However, FM Parra refused to sign a joint declaration to that effect after meeting with his counterpart in Bogota on August 31, because the GOC was unwilling to suspend aerial spraying during the study.

17. (C) Speculation that the impending change of Foreign Minister here, projected for early October, might affect the fumigation issue was put to rest when President Palacio included the issue in his recent UNGA speech. Palacio has also stated publicly that incoming FM Francisco Carrion would change the tone, but not the content, of bilateral dialogue with Colombia.

FARC Designation Another Thorn

18. (C) Shortly after taking office, Minister of Defense Oswaldo Jarrin added fuel to the bilateral fire by publicly insisting that the GOE does not consider the FARC to be terrorists, and has never designated them as such. Parra and Palacio have since publicly refused to label the FARC, citing the GOE's policy of non-intervention. Colombian Ambassador to the U.S. Andres Pastrana criticized these statements publicly at a university forum in which incoming FM Carrion was present, saying Colombia needed solidarity, not equivocation, from its neighbor. Carrion refused to comment for the GOE, deferring publicly to Parra. Jarrin told the Ambassador, after the recent breakup of the FARC camp in Ecuador, that he would give no respite to the FARC and had given orders to the military accordingly, a stance that signals stronger action than in the past.

Comment

19. (C) On balance, bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries are solid, if publicly marred by non-essential issues. We are most encouraged that Palacio's efforts to assertively combat the FARC presence in Ecuador signal cooperation on core interests. The fluid dialogue between the two leaders is also positive.

110. (C) Fumigation and semantics about the FARC are second-tier issues with domestic political ramifications here, requiring more work between the two. We are coordinating closely with the Colombian Embassy in Quito, which seems relatively sanguine about the situation. With some additional work, the fumigation issue will head into a technical study phase. We expect the issue will not only outlast Parra's tenure in the Foreign Ministry but perhaps Palacio's turn in office as well. We do not see advantage in the USG taking a public lead on the issue. Rather, we will continue to encourage better communication from behind the scenes.

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